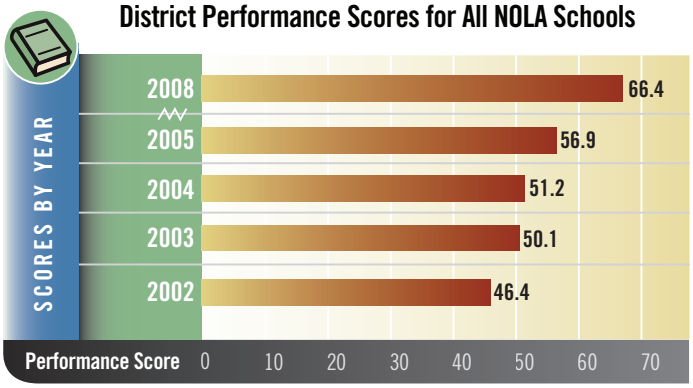
Public School Performance in New Orleans: 2007-2008

The most promising news that came from the 2007-2008 school performance scores was the improvement of public schools in New Orleans overall:

If schools in New Orleans were still in one district, their district performance score would be 66.4 for the 2007-2008 school year. While still low, this represents a significant increase of nearly 10 points from the district's pre-Katrina score of 56.9 in the 2004-2005 school year.

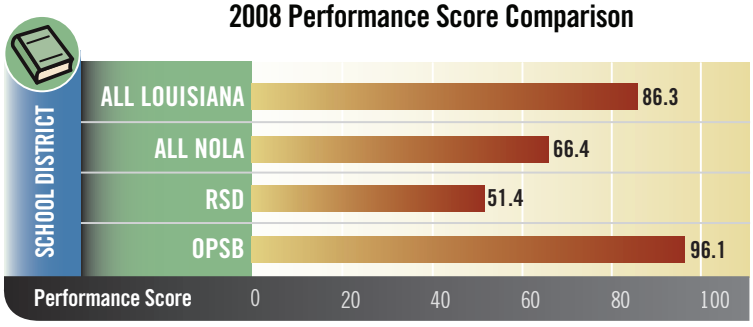
To put this 10-point jump into perspective, public schools in New Orleans also improved by 10 points in the three years between 2002 and 2005; however, no major disaster occurred during that period. Indeed, considering that many students came back to the city after Katrina having spent time out of school and suffering from the trauma of displacement, this increase in overall performance is promising.



At the same time, it is unclear how similar the current population of students is to the student population before the storm. Because it was harder for poor New Orleanians to return to the city after Katrina, the proportion of families living in extreme poverty in New Orleans has declined according to US Census Bureau estimates. For instance, in 2005 (before Katrina) the census estimated that 12.3 percent of families had a household income below $10,000 and that 38.1 percent of minors lived in poverty; in 2007, the census estimated that only 6.4 percent of families had a household income below $10,000 and that 31.4 percent of minors lived in poverty.[63] While the 2007 numbers are still high, this change represents a significant decline in the proportion of the New Orleans population that lives in extreme poverty. By extension, this may mean that the proportion of very poor students, who are most likely to have educational challenges, has also declined. Free lunch statistics do not track this change because the cutoff point for eligibility is above the poverty line. It is possible that part of the increase in achievement is due to the loss of some of the poorest and most challenged students that attended public schools before Katrina. However, as with many post-Katrina statistics, it is also important to note that there is an ongoing debate about the accuracy of the post-storm census numbers.[64]

It is also difficult to compare scores for different schools in New Orleans because the context from one school to the next is very different. Following Hurricane Katrina, the school system was split by the state takeover of failing schools. Using power given to it by the Legislature in November 2005, the Louisiana Department of Education placed over 100 low-performing New Orleans schools into the state Recovery School District (RSD). Some schools became open-admission charter schools, others were opened as RSD-run schools, and some remain closed. Those high-performing schools that were not taken over, many of which had some form of admission criteria, were either chartered or continued to be operated by the Orleans Parish School Board (OPSB). Schools were assigned to one of the two post-storm systems, RSD and OPSB, based on their academic performance. As a result, RSD schools will tend to perform below the state and local average while OPSB schools will tend to perform above them, at least for the next few years.

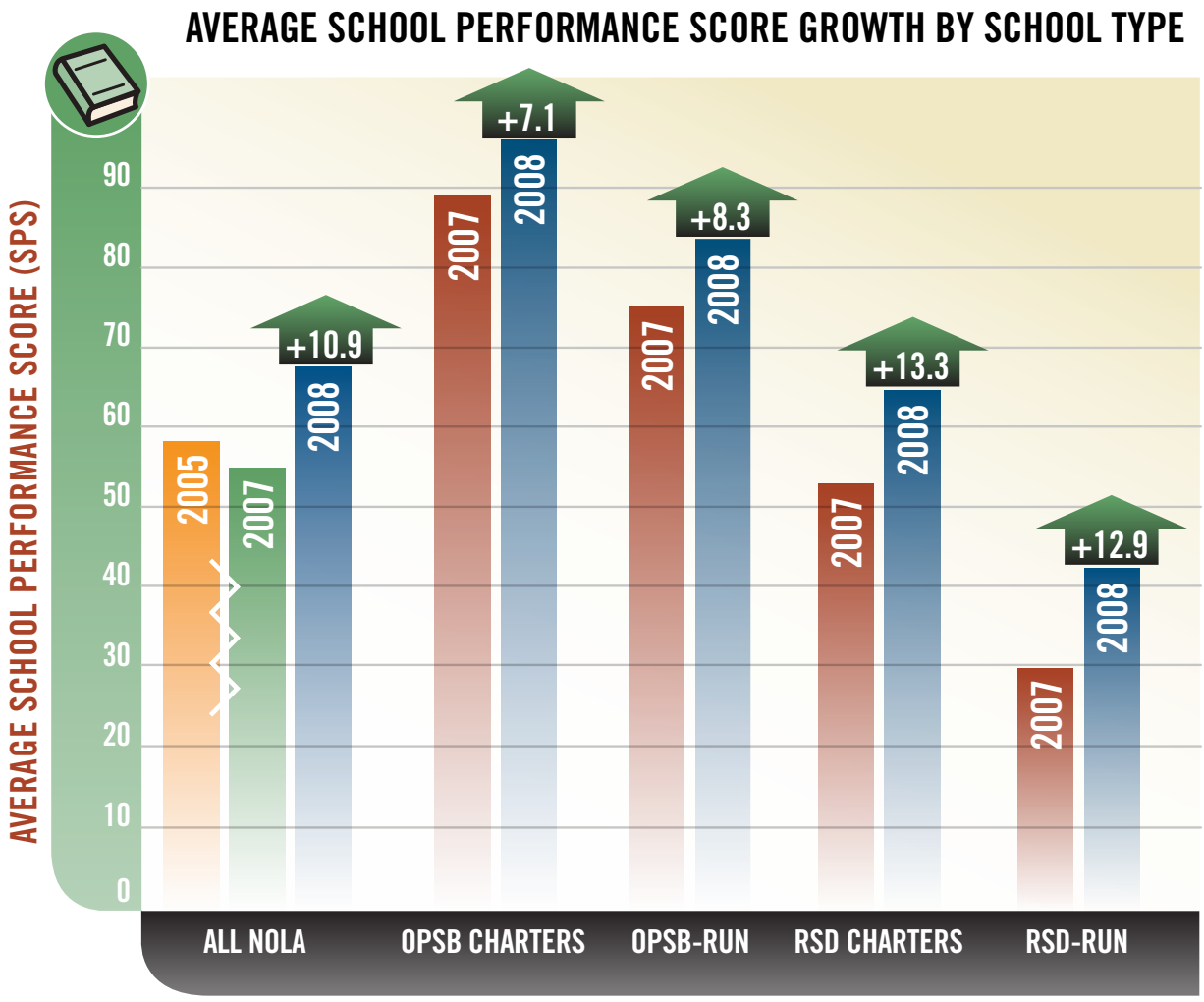
While all public schools in New Orleans serve significant populations of low-income students, RSD schools (charter and traditional) serve higher proportions of low-income students than OPSB schools (charter and traditional). In addition, all RSD schools have open admissions policies by law, whereas many OPSB schools have some form of academic criteria for admission. Academic criteria are generally associated with higher school performance scores because students have already met certain academic requirements to enter the school. For these reasons, it is not particularly useful or valid to compare OPSB and RSD school performance scores.



Within each district, there were also significant differences between the average performance of charter and traditional schools.[65] In both the OPSB and the RSD, charter schools had higher average performance scores than traditional district-run schools. Within the OPSB, charters are more likely to have selective admissions and thus generally have higher performance scores. The differences between RSD charters and RSD-run schools, all of which are officially open access, are discussed in more detail below. In spite of their lower absolute scores, school performance scores grew more for RSD schools than for OPSB schools between the 2006-2007 school year and the 2007-2008 school year. Indeed, the average performance score for every school type in New Orleans grew over the past two years.

RSD charter and RSD-run schools merit some comparison because their student populations are similar and their schools have no academic criteria for admission. Comparing averages between RSD charters and RSD-run schools is misleading, however, because the lowest scoring schools with open admissions are generally high schools. RSD-run schools include five high schools with school performance scores. By contrast, only one RSD charter high school (O. P. Walker) was assigned a school performance score for the 2007-2008 school year.[66] In addition, RSD high schools have lower reported percentages of students eligible for free lunch than RSD K-8 schools. The percentage of high school students who are reported as eligible for free lunch tends to be lower than in K-8 schools due to poor reporting in the upper grades and lower parent motivation to fill out the necessary forms. It is unlikely that RSD high schools have significantly lower poverty rates than RSD K-8 schools. This disparity in the data makes comparisons between high schools and other schools difficult, since poverty is so closely related to achievement.

	Average SPS	Average SPS Growth	Average Percent Free Lunch
RSD Charter High School (O.P. Walker)	48.6	0.5	89.04%
RSD-run High Schools	22.8	3.2	68.57%



A more valid comparison can be made between RSD charter K-8 schools and RSD-run K-8 schools. Both groups serve similar grades and demographics and report similar levels of students qualifying for free lunch (in part because free lunch data is more accurate in the lower grades). While RSD charter K-8 schools perform at a higher average level than RSD-run K-8 schools, the achievement of the RSD-run schools grew by slightly more over the past two years. It is important to note that averages can be misleading, as there is variation in absolute scores and growth among the schools within each group. However, it is useful to think about the different contexts in which the two groups of schools operate, and how these contexts may, or may not, influence their different outcomes.

	Average SPS	Average SPS Growth	Average Percent Free Lunch
RSD Charter K-8 Schools	66.9	14.5	90.93%
RSD-run K-8 Schools	51.0	17.0	86.77%

The proportion of special education students (or students with disabilities) has been cited as an important difference between RSD charter and traditional schools.[67] RSD charter K-8 schools reported a lower proportion of special education students than RSD-run schools in the 2007-2008 school year. Most special education students take the same tests as non-special education students and, on average, score lower than their peers. As the chart below shows, New Orleans schools with higher percentages of special education students have lower performance scores on average. (It is also possible that this difference is due to poor data, as anecdotal evidence indicates that some special education students were not properly identified during the 2007-2008 school year).

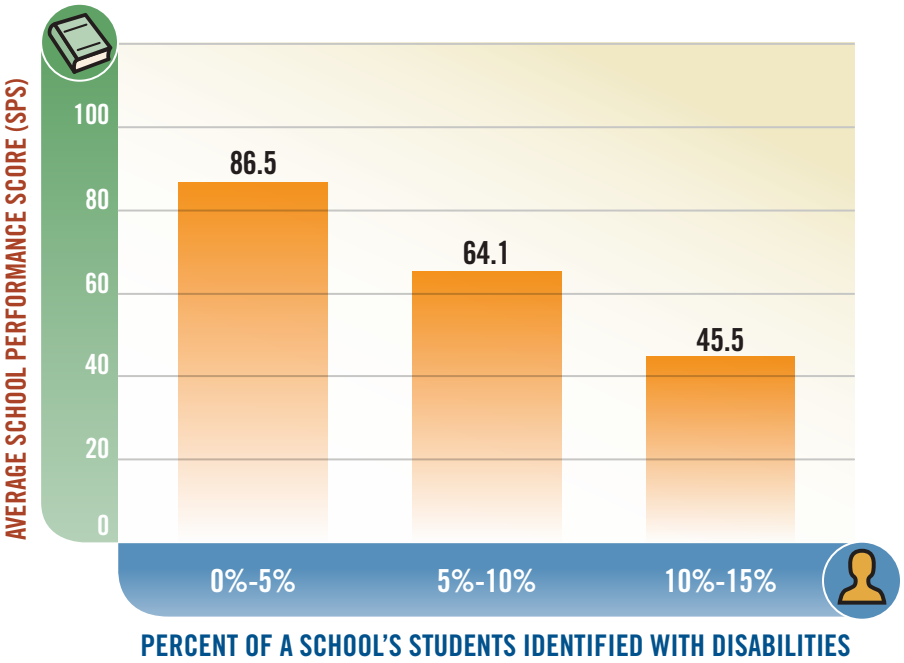
Special Education Students in RSD Charter and RSD-run K-8 Schools

	Average SPS	Average Percent Special Education
RSD Charter K-8 Schools	66.9	5.98%
RSD-run K-8 Schools	51.0	9.45%

Another variation that could play a role in school performance scores is student mobility. The highest performing RSD schools generally had relatively few students coming into the school (or leaving the school) between October 1st and February 1st (the two dates when all schools turn in enrollment numbers), while a number of low-performing schools took in many students mid-year. Test scores for students that come in mid-year are not necessarily counted in a school's SPS, depending on how late they enter the school. However, these students may have a disruptive effect on their classes and on the school culture. While many RSD charters recruited their students early for the 2007-2008 school year, RSD-run schools were more likely to take in students that transferred into the system mid-year or that left other schools. This may have had some influence on overall school performance.

SPECIAL EDUCATION AND SCHOOL PERFORMANCE IN NEW ORLEANS

The Relationship Between the Percentage of Students with Disabilities and School Performance Scores in New Orleans Schools



Student Mobility in RSD Charter and RSD-run K-8 Schools

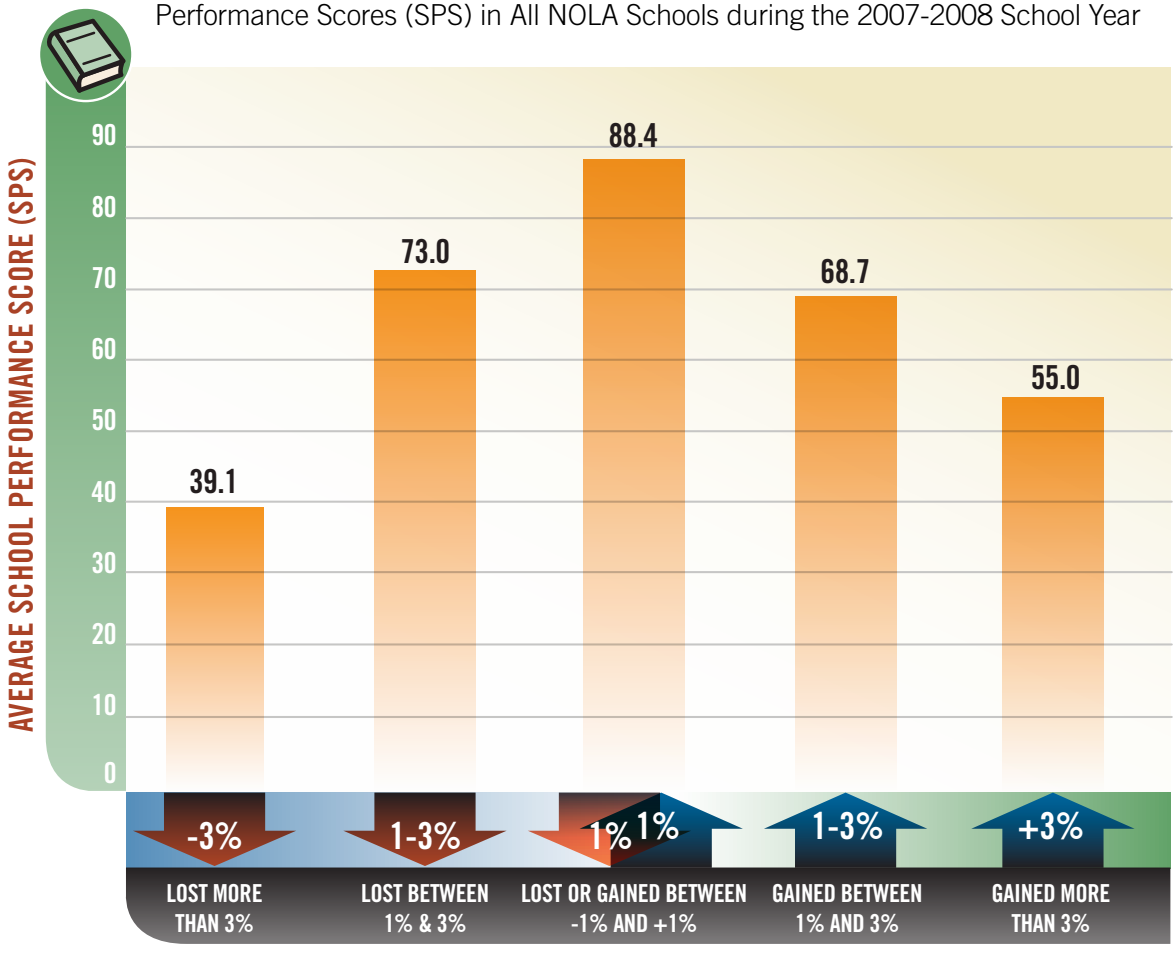
	Average SPS	Average Percent Change in Enrollment (Oct. 1 -Feb. 1)
RSD Charter K-8 Schools	66.9	0.62%
RSD-run K-8 Schools	51.0	5.76%

Indeed, as the graph below shows, higher student mobility (both gains and losses) is associated with lower school performance scores. By contrast, schools with little change in population performed the best on average. While it may be promising that low-performing schools are losing students (i.e., that students may be choosing to leave low-performing schools), it is worrisome that the schools where students are most likely to enter mid-year also tend to be low-performing. Charter schools across the city, which experienced less student turnover, tended to recruit students early and fill up by the beginning of the school year. As a result, less sophisticated parents who did not sign their children up early may have been more likely to enroll their children in district-run schools. This could account for some of the variation in performance as well.

Finally, the difference in average school performance may also be due to school quality. Teachers and parents who took the Cowen Institute's surveys in the spring of 2008 generally gave RSD charters higher marks for satisfaction than RSD-run schools. This could be an indication of a school's ability to serve its students better, teach them more effectively, and in turn help them achieve at a higher level.

CHANGE IN SCHOOL ENROLLMENT AND SCHOOL PERFORMANCE IN NEW ORLEANS

The Relationship Between Mid-year Change in School Enrollment and School Performance Scores (SPS) in All NOLA Schools during the 2007-2008 School Year



SCHOOL ENROLLMENT GAINED OR LOST BETWEEN OCTOBER 1ST AND FEBRUARY 1ST

Conclusion:

In general, it is hard to know at this point what accounts for different school outcomes without more detailed information about the operating environment of individual schools and the performance of individual students.

The abolishment of school attendance zones has allowed more students and parents to choose among a variety of public school options. Because schools in New Orleans now recruit students from across the city, it is more difficult to know what skill levels students bring to a school versus what a school imparts to them. In addition, more students are self-selecting into certain types of schools, making it that much more difficult to identify the key determinants of school performance.

That said, it is very promising that schools are improving across the board in New Orleans. More information is needed, however, before we can understand why schools are improving and identify those practices and models that work. Finally, the success or failure of public education reforms in New Orleans will not be fully evident until more information becomes available in the years ahead.

Appendix: School by School Performance in New Orleans*

School Name	Grade Configuration	2007 Assessment Index	2008 Baseline SPS	SPS Growth	% Free Lunch (Feb 2008)	% Disabled (Feb 2008)	% Change in Enrollment (Oct 2007 - Feb 2008)
OPSB Charter Schools							
Benjamin Franklin High School	9-12	170.0	165.2	-4.8	41.36%	0.55%	-0.73%
Lusher Charter School	K-12	129.2	135.0	5.8	35.11%	3.72%	-0.56%
Lake Forest Elementary Charter School	K-8	111.7	122.1	10.4	69.71%	2.64%	0.97%
Audubon Charter School	PK-8	100.8	108.9	8.1	44.96%	2.97%	0.90%
Edward Hynes Charter School	K-8	94.3	103.8	9.5	62.38%	6.93%	-1.70%
Robert Russa Moton Charter School	PK-7	64.1	90.8	26.7	93.01%	1.47%	2.26%
Einstein Charter School	K-8	65.9	84.9	19.0	90.98%	4.41%	5.89%
Alice Harte Elementary Charter School	K-8	69.9	82.9	13.0	63.67%	9.48%	-0.16%
Edna Karr Secondary School	9-12	85.0	77.0	-8.0	60.03%	2.65%	-1.49%
Warren Easton Senior High School	9-12	64.7	76.6	11.9	81.58%	2.67%	-1.08%
New Orleans Charter Science and Mathematics HS	9-12	70.4	70.4	0.0	68.80%	3.90%	-2.71%
Priestley School of Architecture/Construction	9-10	47.4	41.4	-6.0	92.65%	8.82%	-6.42%
OPSB Charter Schools Average SPS		**89.5**	**96.6**	**7.1**			
OPSB-run Schools							
Mary Bethune Elementary Literature/Technology	PK-6	88.4	108.0	19.6	93.07%	12.77%	0.74%
Benjamin Franklin Elem. Math-Science Magnet	PK-6	89.9	107.2	17.3	79.56%	8.22%	1.84%
Eleanor McMain Secondary School	7-12	82.4	81.1	-1.3	68.14%	4.71%	0.14%
McDonogh #35 Senior High School	7-12	66.1	76.3	10.2	67.43%	4.59%	0.42%
Orleans Parish PM School	7-12	50.5	46.2	-4.3	63.37%	5.94%	4.12%
OPSB-run Schools Average SPS		**75.5**	**83.8**	**8.3**			
RSD Charter Schools							
E. Phillips: KIPP Believe College Prep	4-6	66.6	98.6	32.0	79.53%	6.43%	0.00%
McDonogh #15: A KIPP Transformation School	PK-8	78.9	94.4	15.5	88.27%	9.73%	-0.44%
Martin Behrman Elementary School	PK-8	82.3	92.6	10.3	92.46%	6.80%	3.42%
Dr. M.L.K. Charter School for Science & Tech.	PK-8	72.6	89.2	16.6	98.02%	2.34%	0.18%
Sophie B. Wright Inst.of Academic Excellence	4-8	60.9	74.6	13.7	99.69%	6.12%	2.19%
Dwight D. Eisenhower Elementary School	K-8	60.0	66.7	6.7	78.37%	7.21%	0.19%
Nelson Elementary School	PK-8	65.9	65.5	-0.4	98.82%	6.18%	-2.30%
P. A. Capdau School	K-10	54.1	62.4	8.3	87.92%	5.58%	0.00%
William J. Fischer Elementary School	PK-8	36.8	62.1	25.3	92.51%	6.32%	-1.39%
Samuel J. Green Charter School	K-8	44.9	60.0	15.1	92.62%	6.77%	0.62%
Lafayette Academy of New Orleans	PK-7	38.6	58.8	20.2	84.67%	8.45%	13.87%
James M. Singleton Charter School	PK-8	35.7	55.2	19.5	91.88%	3.77%	-1.57%
Harriet Tubman Elementary School	PK-8	41.3	50.3	9.0	91.58%	5.68%	-3.65%
McDonogh #28 City Park Academy	K-8	29.0	48.6	19.6	88.32%	4.82%	-2.48%
O.P. Walker Senior High School	9-12	48.1	48.6	0.5	89.04%	8.31%	-4.71%
New Orleans Free Academy	K-8	39.5	45.7	6.2	94.85%	2.06%	1.57%
McDonogh #32 Elementary School	PK-8	33.8	41.9	8.1	92.29%	6.99%	-0.95%
RSD Charter Schools Average SPS		**52.3**	**65.6**	**13.3**			

School Name	Grade Configuration	2007 Assessment Index	2008 Baseline SPS	SPS Growth	% Free Lunch (Feb 2008)	% Disabled (Feb 2008)	% Change in Enrollment (Oct 2007 - Feb 2008)
RSD-run Schools							
A.P. Tureaud Elementary School	PK-6	32.9	70.9	38.0	90.03%	3.78%	2.11%
Murray Henderson Elementary School	PK-8	31.8	61.4	29.6	84.25%	10.27%	2.82%
John Dibert Elementary School	PK-8	48.6	56.6	8.0	90.78%	12.63%	-3.93%
Paul B. Habans Elementary School	PK-8	46.1	55.5	9.4	86.53%	6.88%	9.40%
Benjamin Banneker Elementary School	PK-8	40.1	54.3	14.2	87.73%	14.40%	4.46%
James Weldon Johnson School	PK-8	27.1	53.3	26.2	83.39%	10.34%	10.76%
Joseph A. Craig School	PK-8	28.0	52.3	24.3	86.64%	9.35%	-11.09%
Sarah Towles Reed Elementary School	PK-8	35.5	48.8	13.3	95.01%	6.30%	14.76%
Laurel Elementary School	PK-8	29.3	45.8	16.5	85.25%	10.20%	12.17%
Live Oak Elementary School	PK-8	31.9	41.5	9.6	75.77%	11.95%	14.90%
Albert Wicker Elementary School	PK-8	27.6	36.8	9.2	85.51%	10.14%	9.52%
Dr. Charles Richard Drew Elementary School	PK-8	29.5	34.9	5.4	90.31%	7.17%	3.20%
Sarah Towles Reed Senior High School	9-12	28.6	30.0	1.4	64.37%	10.92%	2.41%
Rabouin Career Magnet High School	9-12	24.8	25.5	0.7	67.92%	8.49%	-4.65%
Joseph S. Clark Senior High School	9-12	15.3	21.4	6.1	65.96%	13.05%	-4.22%
John McDonogh Senior High School	9-12	16.8	20.9	4.1	75.00%	13.58%	-0.97%
Fredrick A. Douglass High School	9-12	12.7	16.3	3.6	71.62%	10.27%	-9.98%
RSD-run Schools Average SPS		**29.8**	**42.7**	**12.9**			
BESE Charter Schools							
International School of Louisiana	K-7	99.2	97.5	-1.7	43.05%	0.00%	-1.33%
Milestone SABIS Academy of New Orleans	K-8	52.7	61.4	8.7	92.17%	1.83%	16.06%
BESE Charter Schools Average SPS		**76.0**	**79.5**	**3.5**			

* Only schools that were open in both the 2006-07 school year and the 2007-08 school year received a school performance score (SPS) in 2008. Thus, new schools that opened in 2007-08 are not included in this table.

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